

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, Sept. 27, 1932.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "A House Furnishing Story." Information from the Extension Service,
U.S.D.A.

--oo--

As the days begin to grow shorter and the air gets a frosty chill, most of us feel the call of the indoors. The wide open spaces may appeal in summer. But at this time of year, a cozy place by our own fireside looks most inviting.

I suppose that's one reason why most of us housekeepers get the urge to fix up our homes at this season. That bare wall in the living room, the lamp that needs a new shade, the worn cushions on the lounge-- these little things didn't bother us much during the summer. But now that we're going to be spending so much of our time inside, we want everything attractive and comfortable. That's a worthwhile aim, too, don't you think? A pleasant home brings so much enjoyment to the entire family, does so much to make family life happy.

So when the children go off to school, when the fall canning and sewing are done, then we can devote ourselves to fixing up the house.

"But," said a friend of mine the other day, "but we have almost no money to spend on the house this year, even though it needs redecorating badly. The living room rug is faded and worn, the sofa needs a new cover, we need some new lamps so we can all read in the living room if we want to and we need some comfortable easy chairs. But we just can't afford this sort of thing. And that ends the matter."

Oh, no. Not necessarily. Not if you're like a group of Home Bureau women in New York State who have become experts at fixing over homes at low cost, and using the materials they have on hand or even old discarded furniture.

Let me tell you the story of one old home they did over. This house they used as their problem while they were learning the art of house furnishing at lowest cost. They met at intervals all winter to work on the house. In spring it was open to the public for inspection and hundreds of people from far and wide came out to see it.

But I'm getting ahead of my story. This "demonstration house," as these women called it, was an old parsonage, much like many homes built years ago. It was in good condition as far as the building was concerned, but it was unattractive, inconvenient and uncomfortable to live in. The whole house upstairs and down was papered in dark, gloomy wallpaper. The woodwork was also dark. As a result, the rooms themselves were dark and dreary looking. The kitchen was an old-fashioned inconvenient room with one long high window, a sink with an old pitcher pump, big old cupboards but none of the modern convenient drawers and shelves near the working center.

The young son in the family happened to be without work at the time. He and the old grandfather were both handy with their tools. So they turned that tall window on its side and placed the sink under it. That gave twice as much light in the kitchen. They improved the water system and had faucets installed and the old pump removed. They made drainboards for the sink and put in drawers by its side. Since the kitchen was large, they built a convenient sewing unit in one corner, all out of packing boxes. A built-in cabinet under the table held the sewing machine, an ironing board was fastened to the wall, drawers held sewing supplies such as patterns, thread, shears and so on. It made a very cozy, cheerful and convenient place to sit and sew in on a winter afternoon.

This kitchen, one of the most attractive rooms in the whole house, took its color scheme from a bowl of nasturtiums. To give light to the room, the women painted the walls and woodwork ivory. Blue-green and shades of yellow and orange were used for the inside of the cupboard, or for the chairs, table and the sewing nook.

All over the house the women had the problem of dark walls and woodwork. But they repapered and painted, giving the small, dark, stuffy-looking rooms a feeling of light and space by the light backgrounds. The cold, uninteresting rooms they made cheerful and warm with warm colors in paper and paint.

Several rugs in the house didn't harmonize. For example, one bedroom had walls of a soft lavender, yet the rug was a dingy tan. This rug the women changed to a lovely mulberry color with two dye baths. Then the two "front parlors" were thrown into one large living room. One room had a grey rug, the other a brown rug. Of course, that wouldn't do, so they dyed the grey rug a soft warm brown.

Of course, all this work was supervised by a specialist from the State College and by the Home Demonstration agent, but the women themselves actually did the job.

Perhaps the greatest improvement for the least money was an old spring rocker brought in from the barn. The chair had been standing on the porch all winter and a puppy had torn off all the covering and even the springs. To be quite frank, that old spring rocker had been no beauty to begin with. But by the time the women took it over, it looked like a hopeless wreck. But these ingenious women took springs and hair from an old automobile cushion. They fastened the springs onto the seat and padded them with the hair. Over it all they tacked on pieces of an old quilt. Finally they dyed some heavy cotton material a rust color and made it into a slip cover for the chair. And there was a good looking, very comfortable chair, all made for one dollar.

Yellow or gold curtains, suggesting sunlight, dyed by the women themselves went up at the windows instead of the staring white curtains or the dark, dull ones that had been there before.

As for lamps, the women made them themselves also, by wiring bowls or vases and making parchment shades.

Many lovely old pieces of furniture, long since discarded and put in the



attic, came down. The women repaired and refinished them to bring out the lovely color and grain of the old wood.

When the house had its reception in the spring the agent wrote one of her friends about the event. Here's what she said: "It was interesting to listen to the remarks that the people made as they went through the house, to watch them as they looked under the slip covers, ran their hands over lovely old wood, oh'd and ah'd at the dyed rugs, the color of the paint and so on. It was interesting, too, to hear them say, 'You know, I have an old chair like that that I could make over,' or 'Now would you believe that rug had been dyed,' or 'Roofing on the floor? And it looks nice too. I have lots at home under my barn', 'That window was just turned on its side and then they put the sink under it. Doesn't it give good light to work by,' And so on. Anyone listening in on the sidelines knew that these visitors were picking up ideas to make their own homes pleasant. You should have seen how proud and happy the owner of this house was."

This story proves, doesn't it, that you don't have to spend a lot of money to make an attractive home? If you are clever with your fingers, you can make over what you have with needles and thread, varnish and paint, and tints and dyes. If your house seems dark, lighten up the backgrounds and use cheerful curtains that suggest sunlight by their color. If you need a comfortable chair, how about repadding and covering that old chair in the attic? If you need more lamps, make your own.

You can get lots of ideas by looking at the magazines, by seeing the housefurnishing exhibits at stores, by picking up ideas from your neighbor's homes when you go calling, and by consulting your home demonstration agent. Some of the very simplest houses are the most attractive and most comfortable.

Wednesday: "Planning a Grange Dinner".

